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CAMBODIA: Rift between Prime Minister Lon Nol and
Chief of State Cheng Heng. (Page 5)

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CAMBODIA: A serious personal rift between Prime Minister Lon Nol and Chief of State Cheng Heng has imposed a new strain on governmental unity.

The deteriorating relations between the two leaders stem principally from the prime minister's suspicion that Cheng Heng is leading a "third force" seeking a compromise with Hanoi and Peking. Cheng Heng has hotly denied this charge, and remains deeply offended by it. The chief of state is also upset, as are a number of other officials, over what he considers the arbitrary manner in which Lon Nol has conducted governmental affairs in Sirik Matak's absence.

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Besides facing this new problem, Matak may find himself in the middle of a potential confrontation between the National Assembly and the government over the Assembly's pending interpellation of Finance Minister Sok Chhong concerning the regime's economic policies. Lon Nol reportedly is trying to fashion a compromise with Assembly leaders to avert a possible no confidence vote against the minister or perhaps the entire government.

If the Assembly does call for Sok Chhong's resignation, the cabinet apparently is determined to resign along with him. Despite the cabinet's disturbed mood, Matak probably could persuade it to accept Chhong's departure, if this became necessary. In the past, Matak reportedly has said that he would not let the difficulties of one minister bring down the government.

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